

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Brunch in Las Vegas,
Nevada
April 2, 2000

The President. Let me, first of all, say I'm glad to be back. I never get tired of coming here. And most of you know that Brian and I went to college together; in spite of the fact that he now looks younger than me, we did. [Laughter] What can I say? I've had a harder life. [Laughter] And he and Myra have been wonderful to us. And Amy has been good enough to work for me at the White House and for Mrs. Gore, and we feel that she's a part of our family.

Arnold and Rachel have taken me in in Arizona, as well as always coming up here when I show up. And I'm just so grateful to all of you. And Jane always whispers in my ear and tells me what I should really be working on as President and how I should be doing it. [Laughter]

Janie Greenspun Gale. Have I been wrong? [Laughter]

The President. And the thing I really hate about it is that she's normally right. [Laughter] So I feel very much at home here. I'll be quite brief, but I want you to think about a few things.

First, I am very, very grateful to the people of Nevada for supporting me and Hillary and Al and Tipper through two Presidential elections. It's highly unusual for a Democrat to carry this State. And we did it—not by much, but we did it twice. And a lot of you in this room helped.

I am very grateful for the support that you have given all my policies. The nuclear waste issue is very important. I will say this to you—I was not wrong when I said last year—and Brian ran an article in the paper—that we needed Harry Reid back in the Senate, so we would have a veto-proof minority. And we also got—and that was really important. And Shelley Berkley also worked very hard on that, and we now have—my veto can be sustained. And that's very, very encouraging, and I want to thank all of you for that.

But I'd also, in a larger sense, just like to thank you for 7 years and a couple of months of genuine support for a new direction for our country. I want to particularly thank Congress-

man Bilbray, who would still be in Congress if he hadn't supported me. But I want you to know that.

We didn't have a vote to spare in August of 1993, when I asked the Congress to cut the deficit by at least \$500 billion. And I knew if we didn't do it, we'd never get the economy turned around. And it passed by a single vote in the House and the Senate. And Al Gore cast the tie vote in the Senate, and as he said, whenever he votes, we win. [Laughter] That broke the tie, I mean. And every single Member of the House that voted for that bill can claim a large share of responsibility for the economic prosperity this country has enjoyed ever since. And many of them laid their jobs down to do it, and I will never forget it. And I want you to know that I never forgot, and I thank you.

Now, here's what I want to say, and I say this to you partly as your President and partly as a citizen, because I'm not running for anything this year. I'm the only person I know, practically, who's not running for anything. [Laughter] And most days, I'm okay about it.

We're in a position today that is highly unusual for any nation. You know, we're in the middle of the longest economic expansion in history. We have the lowest unemployment rate in 30 years, lowest minority unemployment rates ever recorded, lowest female unemployment rate in 40 years, lowest welfare rolls in 30 years, lowest poverty rates in 20 years, lowest crime rates in 25 years. And the question before the citizens of our country in this election is, now what? What are we going to do with what is truly an unprecedented moment?

If you saw my State of the Union Address, you know what I think we ought to do. I think that we ought to say, this is not a time for relaxing, this is a time for bearing down; that this is a chance of a lifetime, and we ought to identify every major challenge and every major opportunity our country's got out there and go after it, because we will never have a better chance to do it. That's what I believe.

I think that this is the time to build the 21st century education system. This is the time to help all these families, where both mothers and

fathers work, balance work and family. This is the time to help deal with the aging of America, with families who provide long-term care to their parents, for disabled members of their families, to save Social Security and Medicare and add a prescription drug benefit.

It's time to pay the country out of debt. We can get this country out of debt for the first time since 1835. And if we do, we'll give a whole—when Amy's my age, this country will be more prosperous than it otherwise would have been, if we do that.

It's a time to deal with the big environmental challenges. It's a time to deal with the possibility we now have of making this the safest big country in the world. When I became President, most people didn't think the crime rate could go down. It's gone down now 7 years in a row. But no one believes America's as safe as it ought to be.

It's a time to make a major commitment to 21st century science and technology. We were talking at the other table about energy technology and how, if we can just make one more discovery with biofuels, we'll be able to create 8 gallons of ethanol with 1 gallon of gasoline. And when you have cars getting 70 miles per gallon, which will be soon, it would be like getting over 500 miles to the gallon of gasoline. It will change the whole future of the world when this happens.

In a few weeks, we'll have the honor of announcing that the consortium that the United States and Great Britain have been part of for some years, to unlock the mysteries of the human genome, will be completed. And 3 billion genes in 80,000 sequences will all be out there, thanks to computer technology. And when that happens, it won't be long until somebody figures out how to stop people like me when we get old from getting Alzheimer's. Two people in my family have had it.

They'll be able to figure out how to block the gene that causes Parkinson's, that the Attorney General and many other well-known people, including Michael J. Fox, now are dealing with. They will be able to figure out—and Muhammad Ali. They'll be able to figure out how to identify all kinds of cancers when there are just a few cells collected, and it will dramatically increase the cure rate. All this stuff is right around the corner. Not to mention the fact that I think within a couple of years, you'll actually know what's in those black holes in the universe.

This is going to be a very interesting time to be alive.

We also see, in a more sort of tangible way, the role the United States still has for peace and freedom around the world, from the Middle East to Northern Ireland, fighting against terrorism and the spread of weapons of mass destruction, the work I tried to do when I was in India and Pakistan recently.

And I guess what I would like to say to you is that beyond all of the specifics, the simple question of this election is, what are we going to do with this money? And the American people have big choices. And the reason that I support Vice President Gore, quite apart from my personal loyalty to him and affection to him, is that I've worked with him for 7 years, and I know that he understands the future and has the knowledge and experience and the strength to take us there. And that swamps every one of the specifics.

The second reason is that I believe that the Republicans' advocacy of a tax cut even bigger than the one I vetoed last year—for it to become law would mean we could not get the country out of debt; we would not have the money to save Social Security and Medicare; we would not have the money to invest in 21st century schools. All of you would be better off, but only for a little bit. And I think, far better to have a more modest tax cut that helps people educate their children, provide decent child care, deal with this long-term care crisis, which is going to become bigger and bigger and bigger for all of our families, and get the country out of debt, keep interest rates down, and keep the economy going.

That's what I believe. But these are huge choices. And underneath it all there is something that I have—basically has been the great passion of my life, and that is whether we're going to go forward as one America or we're going to go back to politics as usual, where we just divide up in camps and see which camp is bigger.

A couple of Sundays ago—more than that now, but just recently, on a Sunday, I had an opportunity to go to Selma, Alabama, to commemorate the 35th anniversary of Bloody Sunday, where Congressman John Lewis, then just a young man, and Reverend Hosea Williams and comedian Dick Gregory and a lot of others marched across a bridge over a river at Selma on their way to Montgomery. They were beaten

and beaten back. But a few days later, they marched to Montgomery, and 6 months later we got the Voting Rights Act.

And it was one of the—for me as a southerner, it was one of the great moments of my life. And most of the people who walked over that bridge are still alive, and most of them walked over that bridge with me again. But I was thinking about the 35 years that have—some of you are too young to remember; most of you are around my age. Let me tell you something about 35 years ago.

We celebrated the longest economic expansion in history this February. So we were sitting around talking about it one day, and I had all my economic advisers there. And I said, “Now, before we broke this record, when was the last longest economic expansion in history?” Nineteen sixty-one to 1969. So in ’64, I graduate from high school—low inflation; low unemployment; high growth; Lyndon Johnson is President; high optimism that he will be able to lead the country away from the heartbreak of President Kennedy’s assassination, and we’ll solve all the civil rights problems in the Congress and in the courts. We’ve got some people in Vietnam, but nobody thinks it’s going to tear the country apart, and everybody believes America will prevail in the cold war—’64.

And even in the bloody conflicts like Selma, it was all part of progress, you know. Things were happening. Okay. Four years later, 1968, we’re graduating from college, Brian and I are. June 8, 1968, we’re at Georgetown finishing college 2 days after Robert Kennedy was killed, 2 months after Martin Luther King was killed, 9 weeks after Lyndon Johnson said he couldn’t run for President anymore because the country was just split right down the middle on the Vietnam war.

A few weeks later, President Nixon is elected on one of these “us” and “them” campaigns. I call them “us” and “them” campaigns. He represented the Silent Majority—that was his slogan—which meant those of us that weren’t for him, we were in the loud minority, and there was something wrong with us. A few weeks after that, the longest economic expansion in American history came to an end.

Now, what’s that got to do with this? You know, I’m not trying to be a downer here; I’m an inherently optimistic person. But this is a moment for making tomorrows. This is not a moment for indulging ourselves in all this good stuff that’s going on today. And the only way to really ensure that it continues to happen is to keep thinking about tomorrow and keep trying to make them and to take on these big challenges we know are out there.

There are going to be twice as many people over 65 in 30 years as there are today. It’s a big challenge. We can fix it right now. We can basically prepare ourselves for it right now. That’s just one example. But that’s the decision the American people are going to have to make. More than anything else is the general thing: Are we going to go back to an approach that is more satisfying in the short run that we know doesn’t work, or are we going to try to keep building on the change of the last 7 years? Are we going to pick leaders that we know understand the future and can take us there, or are we going to pick people who say things we like to hear and may make it easier for us in the next month or two?

That’s really what’s going on here. And I guess what I would like to tell you—it hit me with Selma—and I say this more as a citizen than as President. I have waited now for 35 years for my country once again to have a chance to build a future of our dreams for our kids. It’s a long time. It may not happen again in our lifetime. That’s why this election is so important.

So if they ask you why you came here today, I hope you can give them that answer.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:39 a.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to brunch hosts Brian L. and Myra Greenspun and their daughter, Amy; Mrs. Greenspun’s parents, Arnold and Rachel Smith; Janie Greenspun Gale, vice chairman, board of trustees, Las Vegas Springs Preserve; former Representative James H. Bilbray; actor Michael J. Fox; former boxing champion Muhammad Ali; and civil rights activists Hosea Williams and Dick Gregory.